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Portugal: Threat to Withdraw from Government

Francisco Sa Carneiro, secretary general of the center-right Popular Democratic Party, created new political uncertainty in Portugal yesterday by threatening to withdraw his party from the present provisional government.

The Popular Democratic leader is demanding that the Socialists drop their plans to form a minority government after the presidential election this summer. He also is insisting that the present government—which is scheduled to continue in office until a new government is formed under a new president—be shuffled to exclude the Communists and to reflect more accurately the results of the legislative assembly election last Sunday.

The Popular Democrats see in Socialist Party leader Mario Soares' continuing references to a minority government the possibility that they will be excluded from participation despite their second-place finish in the election. Sa Carneiro's threat appears designed to exert pressure on the Socialists to come to terms on a coalition government as both he and Social Democratic Center party leader Freitas do Amaral have suggested.

Soares has not reacted publicly to Sa Carneiro's threat, but he is unlikely to give in easily to such pressure tactics. A Popular Democratic withdrawal would leave the Socialists and the Communists as the only parties in the provisional government. This would embarrass the Socialists, who have said on several occasions that they would not govern with the Communists alone. It would also cause concern among anti-Communist "operational" military officers that such a leftist coalition might become a permanent fixture.

Sa Carneiro's strategy could have even more far-reaching consequences, however. Shortly before the assembly election, Prime Minister Azevedo threatened that any political upheaval during the interregnum could cause his resignation. Should Azevedo decide to step down, President Costa Gomes would be required to appoint a successor to form another temporary government. The prospect of a complete government collapse would be unsettling to the military and could play into the hands of those who favor suspending the presidential election and setting aside the legislative results.

Communist Party chief Alvaro Cunhal is unlikely to accept without a fight Sa Carneiro's insistence on removing the Communists. Cunhal has already stated that his party's showing in the election—14.6 percent at final count—entitles it to participate in the new government.

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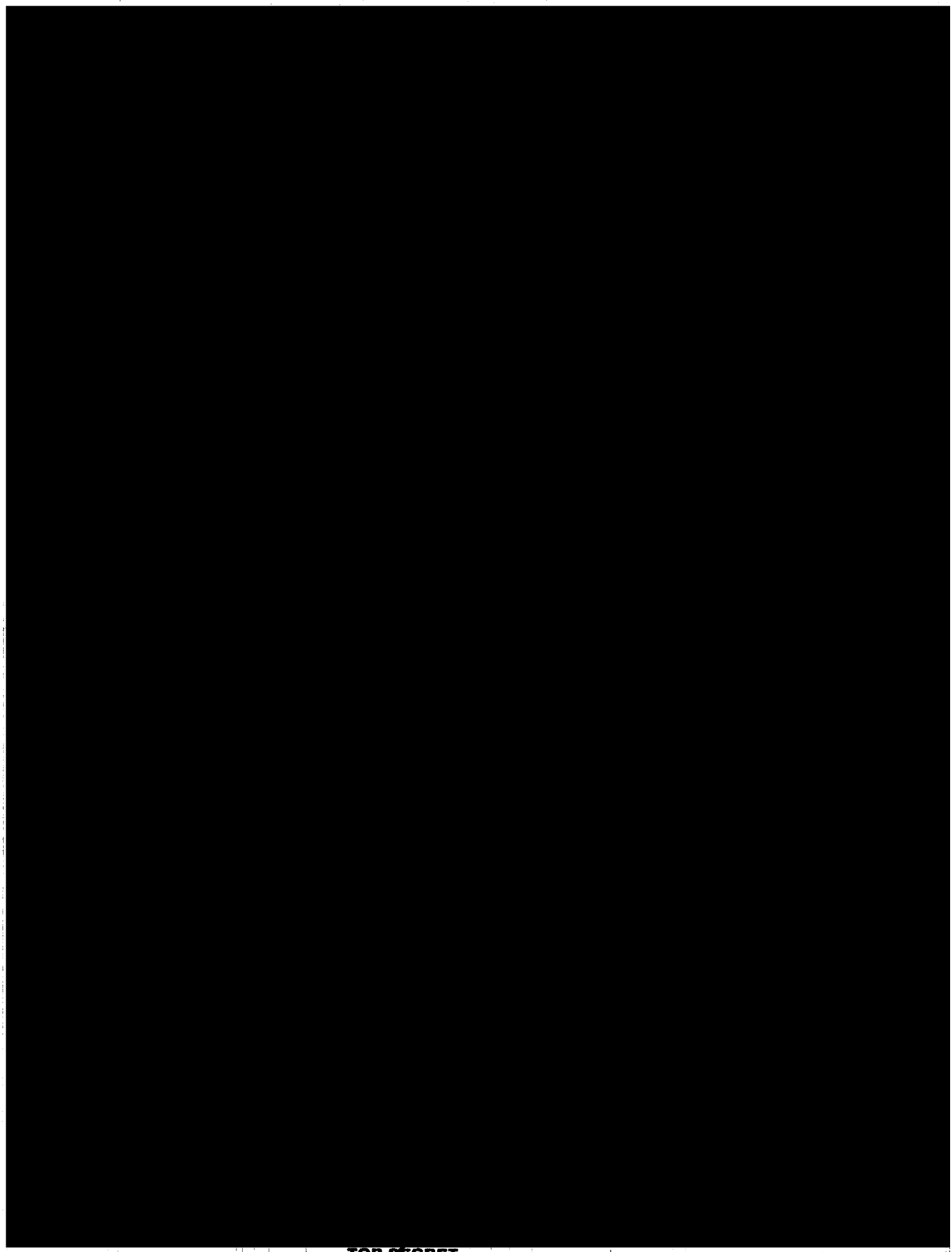

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Portugal. . .

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Efforts to exclude the Communists at this stage could rally support from the "political" officers and thus hasten the showdown between the "politicals" and the "operationals" in the Revolutionary Council.

In addition to the Communists and Socialists, the proposal to reshuffle the provisional government is also opposed by the conservative Social Democratic Center, which although not a party to the present government has become an important political factor because of its third-place finish in the election.

Sa Carneiro's strategy could draw fire from leaders of his own party; he has summoned them into executive session. Dissatisfaction over the disappointing election showing, plus some sentiment for avoiding a wrenching struggle with the other parties and possibly the military, could divide the party. This might ultimately work to the benefit of Soares, who has hoped for just such a split. [redacted]

Angola: Break with Portugal Threatened

The Angolan government yesterday closed its offices in Lisbon and reportedly threatened to break off diplomatic relations within 48 hours unless Lisbon responds satisfactorily to a list of complaints submitted by Luanda. A Portuguese foreign ministry spokesman has announced that Lisbon is studying the list, but did not disclose its details.

Luanda's ultimatum followed accusations by the political bureau of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola that Lisbon has become a "staging area" for anti-Movement forces. In fact, there is little evidence that any of the 300,000 Angolan refugees in Portugal are plotting against the Luanda regime or that Lisbon is encouraging such an effort.

The Popular Movement is still piqued over the failure of Portugal to recognize it as the legitimate sovereign political power in Angola when Lisbon granted independence last November. [redacted]